

SOUTH AFRICA

STORY BY JENNIFER THOMAS

From pristine beaches on the coast to treetop luxury suites, a variety of adventure awaits.

Tsala lodge

The continent of Africa boasts much more than adventurous wild game safaris. Breathtaking landscapes and pristine beaches form the backdrop for a variety of experiences and thrills,

including whale watching, rappelling, skydiving, surfing, wineries and exotic cuisine.

Fort Myers resident Anne Styles has not only vacationed in South Africa but has also resided there with her husband, Peter.



The forest view from the Tsala lodge.

“The tremendous variety of landscape makes South Africa very different to Florida. Some coastal areas have a similar climate with similar flora and fauna to ours, but then there are mountains and high plateaus,” Anne says. “Some of the earliest examples and evidence of the ‘birth’ of mankind, a country of different cultures still learning to live together, makes it living history.”

Having vacationed in South Africa five times, Anne says Namibia and South Africa are her and Peter’s favorite countries.

“In South Africa, Cape Town is the best large city we have visited, but there are several other areas we have been, which are spectacular,” she says. “These include the Stellenbosch wine area near Cape Town, the Garden Route along the coast east of Cape Town, Knysna and the Drakensberg mountains. There are also some wonderful game parks like Kruger (National Park).”

Plettenberg Bay, located along the Garden Route in the Western Cape area, is an ideal South Afri-

can destination for its breathtaking backdrop and numerous activities.

“The scenery is perhaps the greatest highlight of all, and the sweeping vistas of pristine lagoons and beaches can’t easily be beaten anywhere else along the Garden Route. There are six internationally recognized Blue Flag beaches, each with its own personality, along the town’s 20 kilometres of picturesque Indian Ocean coastline,” Plett tourism spokesperson Patty Butterworth writes in an email interview. Blue Flag is a certification by the Foundation for Environmental Education that signifies management of the beach meets stringent environmental criteria. “Lounging in the soft, warm sand is only the beginning. Surfing, skim boarding and bodyboarding are popular among locals and visitors. With up to 12-foot waves, the beaches along Plett’s coastline are home to some of the best waves in South Africa.”

South Africa waters are home to dolphins, whales and seals.

“During winter months (May-October), the spectacular southern right whales, humpback whales and occasionally orca whales take up residence in the bay when they arrive up from the southern oceans to calve,” Patty writes.

In addition to the beaches, the Plett region offers visitors spectacular and diverse nature experiences.

“The region encompasses five different biospheres: forests, fynbos, wetlands, mountains and the coastal region, each with its own abundant offerings,” Patty adds. “The bay is flanked by Robberg Nature Reserve on the one side and the Tsitsikamma indigenous mountains and forests on the other side.”

The small Cape Floral Kingdom between Cape Town and along the Garden Route contains 8,500 species of flowering plants. “This is more than is found in the entire northern hemisphere,” Patty writes. “There are a great many wild proteas, and the list of geophytes that can be seen in the area is extensive.”

Patty says visitors to Plett enjoy the marine life activities (whale watching, diving with seals, sea kayaking, surfing, stand up paddling) as well as animal adventures (largest free-roaming monkey sanctuary and bird aviary, animal rehabilitation centers). Outdoor leisure activities (hiking, cycling, bird watching, wine tasting) coupled with adventures like kloofing — known elsewhere as canyoning or canyoneering — rappelling, skydiving, and bungee jumping all provide for an unforgettable South African vacation.

“Visitors are most taken back by the natural beauty of the area and the amazing fynbos, flora and birdlife this destination offers,” Patty says. “More than 260 species of birds have been sighted in this area with its unique four habitats, namely the forests, fynbos, wetlands and the coastal region, making this area a birdwatchers’ paradise. Special birds include the Knysna loerie, Narina trogon (both found in indigenous forests), the African black oystercatcher (coastal) and the orange-breasted sunbird (fynbos).”

When visiting South Africa, the lodging can be an experience itself. Imagine staying amid the tops of a forest in a luxury treetop lodge. Overlooking the indigenous forests, ideally situated between the coastal towns of Knysna and Plettenberg Bay in Western Cape, Tsala Treetop Lodge is a wonderful location from which to explore the beauty of the celebrated Garden Route, according to Ian Hunter, CEO of Hunter Hotels.

“Tsala exudes a mysticism that makes it a destination people wish to explore and experience. It fills your heart with warmth and steals your imagination with its design, breathtaking views and ideal location,” Ian writes in an email interview.

Tsala has 10 treetop suites tucked into the forest canopy, the essence of indulgence and romance, along with six two-bedroom villas built high above the forest floor to complement the style and architecture of Tsala. The Treetop Suites extend into the forest with a private deck and your own infinity pool, providing the ultimate privacy. The Treetop Villas feature a large lounge with a fireplace and dining area and a forest-facing private deck and infinity pool.

“Tsala is a magical place, encircled by lush forests extending across rolling valleys, toward the distant hills. Upon arrival, Tsala’s impressive stonemasonry entrance flanked by water features leads to a magnificent foyer supported by blackwood columns,” Ian writes. “The elaborate afro-baroque décor’s earthy colours, rich textures and handcrafted fittings are inspired by the diverse cultures of Africa, with the sophistication of the Western World. The views are breathtaking, whether from the exotic dining room, intimate glassed-in lounge or large open decks high above the forest floor.”

Tsala is popular to a wide cross-section of ages, and its typical guests include luxury, high-end travelers and special occasion celebrators, such as honeymooners, birthday guests and wedding parties.

“The magical allure of Tsala is irresistible to those who appreciate exclusivity, fine fare, romance and ad-



The infinity pool in one of Tsala’s treetop suites.

venture,” Ian says.

Tsala means “elevated resting place” in Swahili.

“Spoil yourself with a massage in the comfort of your room with an in-room pamper treatment — nothing beats a full body massage next to your private pool, whilst the leaves rustle in the gentle breeze,” Ian says. “Enjoy a personalized picnic — which can be enjoyed either in the beautiful gardens on the Hunter Hotels Estate or in the privacy of your suite/villa in front of a crackling fire.”

Tsala offers three dining experiences where all cuisine is exquisitely presented in the glass walled dining room.

“For those wanting to enjoy the morning sunshine, the spectacular dining deck, suspended above the forest floor, is the perfect spot. For a casual a la carte lunch and dinner, our award-winning Zinzi Restaurant is just a stroll from Tsala. A third option is our refined country-style dining at Sage at Hunter’s Country House,” Ian outlines.

In terms of local cuisine, Anne says, “Africa is a multi-cultural country that is reflected in their multi-cultural cuisine. They are big meat eaters and you can get local steaks or imported ones at many restaurants. The South African Braai (barbecue) is famous, but also try ostrich steak. Fish along the coast is great.”

In Plett, most restaurants serve continental-style cuisine. Several specialize in traditional South African

foods, and there are some very good seafood restaurants. Patty recommends The Fat Fish, Emily Moon, Enrico’s Ristorante, Nguni and Zinzi.

Exploring the magic of the Garden Route is a must-do while in South Africa. Ian recommends whale, dolphin and seal watching with Ocean Blue Adventures and experiencing Plettenberg Bay’s marine life via boat. There are also beautiful hiking trails.

“Tsitsikamma, Featherbed and Robberg are a few of the Nature Reserves in the area that offer a variety of different walks and hikes. From tough 4-hour treks along the scenic Robberg Peninsula to the more relaxed wander through the Garden of Eden Forest,” Ian says. The Robberg Peninsula jets out into the Indian Ocean.

Anne especially enjoys wine tasting and vineyard exploring while visiting this destination. Ian recommends taking a meandering tour of the wineries around Plettenberg Bay. In fact, the area has become an emerging wine region — with mostly sauvignon blanc, pinot noir and méthode cap classique wines (the traditional Champagne method), according to Patty. “The area currently hosts 16-plus boutique wine farms, and there is an annual Plett Wine & Bubbly Festival that is very popular during September and October.”

After retreating back to Tsala after a day of exploring, Ian recommends, “Watch the sun set over the treetops, with a glass of bubbles in hand, from the privacy of your own balcony set high above the forest floor.” **G**